



**(U) Write Right: Brevity Can Impede Clarity (or, A Capital Situation)**

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*It's not always true that "less is more"... (U)*

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(TS) Our colleagues across the river provided the material for this month's column:

"The ruling former Communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)..."

Which adjectives modify what? Is the ruling party something that used to be called the Communist Democratic Left Alliance? Is there a ruling coalition called the Alliance, that used to be a left-wing democracy? The acronym that follows is in the native language and is therefore no help.

(TS) The situation is further confused by subsequent references to attempts to form a coalition -- an alliance, in fact, although that term is not used. A close reading of the report appears to indicate that the country's ruling party, which used to be a communist organization and is still the left-most of many political parties, is called the Democratic Left Alliance... but it's not absolutely clear -- and this in a report intended to clarify the possibilities for a national parliamentary election. In an executive summary, too, where it's particularly important that readers not have to puzzle over this the way we did. Brevity can impede clarity, and capitalization should be used carefully.

(U) Do not capitalize "communist" unless it is part of an entity's name, since "communist," like "democratic" or "socialist," refers to certain broad principles -- and that's a very different statement than their use as part of a party's name. This means that descriptors derived from a person's name (Marxist, Leninist, Maoist) should be used with particular care so that readers can tell at once on the first reading whether such an adjective is part of a party's name or a description of its philosophy. Otherwise your readers may feel like they're trying to follow a scene from "Monty Python's Life of Brian."

(U) The author did unwittingly do us a favor by providing an opportunity to continue the improvement to the SIGINT Reporter's Style and Usage Manual entries on both Capitalization and [Political Parties and Philosophies](#), which are now appropriately linked:

*political parties and philosophies...*

*(U) Capitalize the name of the party and the word party when they are used together: the Communist Party. Capitalize party when it stands for a specific political party: The Party controls the country.*

*(U) Capitalize Communist, Socialist, etc., when referring to individuals who are members of a specific political party.*

*(U) Use lowercase to refer to the political philosophy or to someone*



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*who advocates a philosophy without being a member of a specific party: communism, socialism, capitalism, socialist, capitalist.*

*Exception: descriptors derived from a person's name (Marxist, Leninist, Maoist).*

**(U) "You should not aim to be understood, but to be impossible to misunderstand." -- Marcus Fabius Quintilian, Roman rhetorician**

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